

"Clean"

What would you consider to be the best multi cleaning product in your world? Dawn? Oxi Clean? Lava soap? Some kind of homemade concoction made with vinegar, lemon juice or some other substances? If you believe advertising, every cleaning product is the best. Truly this is an unfair question because it really depends upon that which needs cleaning? What one uses to clean oil and grease from clothing may be quite different than what one uses to clean windows. Besides, concepts of "clean" are different amongst people. While one person may consider something to be clean because it's been sanitized, another person may consider it germ free but still dirty. Ever been in a restaurant and picked up the silverware to observe that, even though it's gone through the sanitization of the dish washer, there are still food particles on it? Hey, it's clean . . . isn't it? And it's truly germ free food! (Not too appetizing is it?)

No matter what the cleaning product an important dynamic needs to be taken into account—the hands which are using the product. Those hands are connected to a person with certain standards of cleanliness. Usually we talk about one person being more picky than another when it comes to standards of cleanliness. For instance, one

person might consider that fork in the restaurant with the sanitized food on it unacceptable but be willing to accept the fork with a dull film and water spots covering it. Another person would only consider it clean if it was shiny with none of those other characteristics present on it. Thus, you can give the same cleaning product to two people and end up with quite different results.

The facet of God's diamond of forgiveness which we consider tonight is clean. Forgiveness is cleansing, not just of the surface dirt but of the stain that is set in, which no amount of effort on your part and no amount of cleaner you produce, can get it out. It deals with the stain on every human heart. The stain of sin. And no one is exempt from its presence. Psalm 51:5 says you were conceived *in sin* and *in iniquity* your mother birthed you. This is not just a knowledge that you're a sinner. Rather, it is a conviction that you are a filthy, dirty sinner in the present of your holy God. So, what are you going to do about it?

Whether or not they realize it, people do try to be cleansed when they experience the filth of sin in their lives. I've heard of rape victims literally trying to cleanse themselves of the sinful violation of their bodies in a shower or bath, but to no avail. Many try to cleanse themselves of the guilt of their sin by trying to "make it up" to others with kindness and good deeds, never finding satisfaction for their

sins, never knowing if they did enough to have a “clean slate.” Many turn to what have been called “unhealthy coping mechanisms” to deal with the affects of sin, either placed upon them from someone else or by their own committing, only to come back to the reality of the uncleanness of sin when the mechanisms shut down. Many will rebel against such convicting guilt and try to save themselves by excuses for their behavior, ignoring that they sinned or any number of arrogant defenses to keep them blind to their sin-stained heart . . . only to experience a never-ending turmoil in their soul. Your “cleaning products” in your hands cannot remove the stain of sin in your heart.

1 John 1:7 says: *If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.* The only way to recognize if something is dirty or clean is when it is revealed *in the light*. The only way to see your way out of the darkness of sin is in *the blood of Jesus Christ* which *cleanses you from all sin*. The cleansing of your heart from the stain of sin must rest in the hands of the only One Who can do a perfect job of removing it. Jesus once said: *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.* (cf. John 8:12) That guilt over sin is the Holy Spirit moving you as a filthy, dirty sinner out of the darkness and into *the light of life*.

He moves you to repent of your sins, that is, accepting

responsibility for going against God's Will and Word and confessing it to Him, seeking His forgiveness. You cry out in the words of Psalm 51:1-2 → *Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your steadfast love; according to Your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!*

Being confronted by the conviction of your sin is the Holy Spirit driving you into the hands scarred with the nails which placed Jesus on the cross for your sin-stained heart and life to make you spiritually and physically clean. 1 John 1:8-9 are not just words which we speak because they're printed in a hymnal liturgy or bulletin order of worship. They remind us of our need as filthy, dirty sinners for cleansing, through which the Holy Spirit drives us to the cleansing in Jesus. *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to **cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

The Holy Spirit does this on the basis of another washing, another cleansing—your baptism—a means by which you are connected to this cleansing of Jesus in your life. Once again, the cleansing is in God's hands, not yours. Titus 3:5-7 says that God *saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, Whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ***

*our Savior, so that being justified **by His grace** we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* Only God can provide the perfect cleansing of your heart from sin.

The cleansing of the Holy Spirit in your baptism is on-going as He drives you to repentance of your sins daily. Listen to how it's described in your catechism under the question: "What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam (i.e. the sin-stained heart and life) in us should by **daily** contrition (i.e. guilt and sorrow over your sin) and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should **daily** emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." (Luther, Martin. Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation © 2017 Edition. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO p. 24) You experience a **daily** cleansing by the power of the Holy Spirit in your heart and life through repentance of your filthy, dirty sins and trusting in the atoning work of Jesus for you.

Your spiritual cleansing can only happen in the hands of Jesus. Since He needs no cleansing, He takes upon Himself your sins, and therefore you are cleansed by what strikes Him. The sins, which He never committed, were washed away by Him so that they no longer stain you or Him. His cleansing removes the stain from Himself but never returns that stain to us, who caused it. *For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin (i.e. Jesus), so that **in Him** we might*

become the righteousness of God (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21). Based on your baptism, *if you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive you your sins and to **cleanse you from all unrighteousness*** (cf. 1 John 1:9).

Thus, being cleansed in the forgiveness of your sins, you look different and, dare I say . . . even “smell” different? Well, when something is clean you know it by your observation and your nose. Ever smell the aroma of a freshly cleaned carpet or dusted furniture? Or how about the fresh smell of washed laundry hung outside on the clothes line to dry? A heart cleansed from all unrighteousness by the blood of Jesus Christ will look and act differently around others. Instead of sinful works of the flesh the Holy Spirit will produce the fruit of *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* (cf. Galatians 5:19-23). The Scriptures even describe a person with a clean heart as those *through* whom God *spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among others* (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:14-15). And when that dirty stain of sin displays itself again your new behavior repents and takes the forgiven cleanliness of Jesus back into your daily life again. Amen.

Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her,

*that He might sanctify her,
having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,
so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor,
without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,
that she might be holy and without blemish.*

(Ephesians 5:25-27)

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